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One Struggle in My Life: Cleaning the House

Sunday morning at 2:45a.m: “Come back here!” my mother yells, as if the last thirty minutes weren’t well-spent cleaning the entire living room. “Help me pick up the couch, we got to vacuum clean under it,” she shouts in her broken English. I hastily stand up, staring at the clock. It is almost three. Still intoxicated and not feeling too well due to the weekend’s celebrations, the mixture of cleaning chemicals and my mother’s mood swings are not helping my evening get any better. My mom tends to be quite the strange person. She is about five feet tall and weighs no more than one hundred and twenty pounds. However, her persona can be quite intimidating. Never have I ever met somebody so dedicated to getting a whole house clean at such a late hour on a weekend. Her typical excuse for cleaning at this abnormal hour is that she does not want to clean on her days off, which are Sundays.

It impresses me that after working six straight hours without a break at Mandarin Pine, the busiest Chinese restaurant in town, she still has the energy to come home, change outfits, and start cleaning the house around eleven. After she walks through the front door of the house, she unlocks the door of her bedroom, as she does every night, and goes straight to her walk-in closet. My mom immediately begins looking for the most comfortable thing to wear. It’s either one of my old t-shirts that I gave to her or a pair of her old gym clothes that she doesn’t use to work out in anymore.

She begins this evening of cleaning by putting our dirty clothes in the washer, and this week it is my responsibility to make sure all of the clothes get washed and dried. “Color clothes go first,” she reminds me. As I am loading the colored clothes into the washing machine, she runs up to me with a greenish spray bottle and smacks me over the head. “Spray the green (container) in the greasy clothes.” She refers to the red polo shirts and black skirts she wears for work. Living with her for the past five years, I have learned that my mom takes very good care of her clothes, especially her work clothes.

During the next half hour, while the clothes are being washed, I pull up the mats from the kitchen floor, clean the counters and sink, and dust the entire kitchen. My next task is to get the hardwood floors vacuumed, dry mopped, and then wet mopped. Yes, madly enough, I manage to clean all of the floors in the house three times. I complain about our vacuum cleaner to my mother, telling her that it’s old and doesn’t have enough sucking power. She finds a way to prove me wrong by cleaning the inside of the vacuum out or gluing the wheels back on it. In the end, it works perfectly and all that while she is rubbing it in my face. Finally, I grab the Swiffer Sweeper and dry mop all of the flooring that I just vacuumed. After I dry mop, I use the Swiffer to attach a special wet cloth and mop all the floors, yet again. Since we’ve have taken all the carpet out of the house and gotten new hardwood floors about a year ago, my dear mother has broken an average of one Swiffer broom every two months. She has been banned from using the Swiffer due to the fact that every time one breaks, she sends me to Wal-Mart to buy a brand new one that I know will be broken shortly. Like every weekend before, she complains that I didn’t put enough time and effort into cleaning her floors. I reply by saying, “Mom, I don’t want to break another one,” when really

I'm just trying to get the job done quickly so that I can go pass out for the rest of the morning.

Sometimes it makes me think that she may suffer from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder or some other disease of the mind. My mom is a very a clean and tidy person that likes things to look "in order." It's not the fact that she likes everything to be perfect that bothers me, but sweeping and mopping the floor three times is overkill. I don't know anyone who cleans a house as thoroughly as we do every week.

After cleaning the living room, it is usually too late to clean anything else. My mom at this point has finished her share of the cleaning, which is usually just her room and her bathroom, leaving the rest to me. Tired and definitely ready to go to bed, I load the clothes into the dryer. Sometimes, when my mom is in a bad mood, she likes to double check that every task has been done properly.

Her standards are way too high, and every weekend I seem to miss a spot or haven't done something right. She always ends up throwing a huge temper tantrum. Cursing left and right, in Spanish and English, she is screaming at the top of her lungs about how I should clean the house the way she taught me. "This is fucking dirty, I've been teaching you for almost twenty years, and yet you don't seem to learn," as I sit there thinking that my mom must enjoy this time we spend together.

When it comes to cleaning the house at late hours of the night, I can't stand what she becomes. The house feels like a military training camp. It's close to four in the morning now and she is finally showing me some mercy and letting me go to bed only to wake up and finish what I didn't get done later on in the morning. The whole ordeal will start over as

soon as I wake later in the day. Dragging my feet with my eyes barely able to stay open, I find my way to my bed, lie down, exhale deeply, and slip into a comfortable and well deserved sleep.